

# CHULA VISTA POLICE DEPARTMENT

## HOW TO BE A GOOD WITNESS

### Crime Reporting Tips



#### **Dispatch Center**

315 Fourth Avenue

Chula Vista, CA 91910

619-691-5151 Non-emergency

911 Emergency

*Protecting today. Securing tomorrow.*

The last thing the police department wants is for anyone to put themselves in danger while a crime is occurring. However, if you do call to report a crime you will be asked several questions. While these questions may seem redundant, ridiculous and even invasive at times, they are designed to get the most accurate information necessary to assist officers with helping a victim and/or in apprehending a suspect.

If you have witnessed or are witnessing a crime in progress, try to remain calm and remember the most important detail is LOCATION. The police department can't help if they don't know where you are. Modern technology is helpful but in some circumstances does not provide the necessary information. The 911 system provides an address, phone number and resident/business name if the call is from a landline. Cell phones only provide latitude and longitude. While knowing the latitude and longitude helps, this only narrows a location down to within 100 meters in any direction. Unfortunately, the sophisticated equipment shown on television crime dramas and police shows isn't real life.

Dispatchers try to keep people on the phone while a crime is occurring whenever possible in order to give responding officers real-time updates. While it may appear the dispatcher is 'wasting time' asking for this information, these real-time updates are being added directly to the call and immediately relayed to the responding officers in the field. The more information gathered and disseminated quickly, the better chance police have of preventing further injury, property loss and catching the suspects or person(s) responsible.

The following tips will help you to be a good witness.

1. **Location, Location, Location.** If you don't know the exact address, a street name and a hundred block, or closest intersection helps. Landmarks are good for most dispatch staff as well.
2. **What happened?** Was it a crime or an accident? We will ask direct questions to try and ascertain what the officers will be dealing with at the scene.
3. **Is anyone injured?** Is medical assistance necessary?
4. **Are/were any weapons involved?** If so what kind of weapon(s)? Where is the weapon now?
5. **Is the suspect still there?** Is he/she still in the area? Who is the suspect? What do they look like? The dispatcher will prompt you for a general physical description such as race, height, weight, hair color and clothing the suspect is wearing.
6. **If the suspect left, try to get a direction of travel.** Did they leave on foot or in a vehicle? If they left in a vehicle, try to get a description of the vehicle (ie. color, make, model, body style and license plate). Be sure to note if there was anything unusual about the vehicle (ie. camper, bumper stickers, broken windshield, tinted windows, etc.) The dispatcher will ask for this information and prompt you for answers.